

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

1998 ANNUAL REPORT

**MISSOURI REHABILITATION SERVICES
FOR THE BLIND**

Dear Commissioner Schroeder:

Enclosed you will find the 1998 annual report produced by the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind. As in previous years, we have continued to provide Rehabilitation Services for the Blind with information, analysis and ideas for the improvement of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired. Our review of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with the public forums we hold in conjunction with our meetings, has given consumers an important source of input into the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind.

As Chairman of the Council I want to draw special attention to the continuing, consistent and increasing number of blind men and women who have gone to work after having completed their training with RSB. The numbers demonstrate dollars well spent.

We hope that you find this report to be complete and informative. We stand prepared to answer any questions about this report, the operations of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind or the work of the Rehabilitation Council.

Sincerely,

Jerry Annunzio
Chairman

Dear Governor Carnahan:

Enclosed you will find the 1998 annual report produced by the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind. As in previous years, we have continued to provide Rehabilitation Services for the Blind with information, analysis and ideas for the improvement of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired. Our review of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with the public forums we hold in conjunction with our meetings, has given consumers an important source of input into the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind.

As Chairman of the Council I want to draw special attention to the continuing, consistent and increasing number of blind men and women who have gone to work after having completed their training with RSB. The numbers demonstrate dollars well spent.

We hope that you find this report to be complete and informative. We stand prepared to answer any questions about this report, the operations of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind or the work of the Rehabilitation Council.

Sincerely,

Jerry Annunzio
Chairman

MISSOURI
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

CHAIRMAN - JERRY ANNUNZIO

VICE-CHAIRMAN - PATRICIA MORROW

SECRETARY-TREASURER - PAUL MIMMS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS - KEN EMMONS
CEIL CALLAHAN

MEMBERS - VICTORIA BRUST
PATRICK BURCH
CEIL CALLAHAN
BILL COBB
CHRIS CRAIG
RHONDA DYCUS
LUCILLE FIERCE
RAYMOND E. HAILEY II
KENT KOLAGA
EDWARD LANSER
BURTON MAURER
ROBERT MORAN
LORENA PERKINS

RSB DIRECTOR - SALLY HOWARD

STAFF MEMBERS - RITA LYNCH
MICHAEL MERRICK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	Page 1
TABLE I. TYPES OF CLOSURES BY EXPENDITURE AND WAGES	Page 3
SECTION II. RESULTS OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SYSTEM DURING FISCAL YEAR 1998	Page 4
SECTION III. ACTIVITIES OF REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND DURING FY 1998	Page 5
SECTION IV. SUMMARY	Page 19

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC), created by Executive Order 93-01 on February 5, 1993, is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), a section of the Missouri Division of Family Services (DFS), on its provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

During the period of this report, the SRC worked diligently in cooperation with RSB in many areas to improve the scope, range and quality of vocational rehabilitation services available in Missouri. Some of the areas in which the SRC has concentrated its efforts this year include:

A previously unsurpassed number of Missourians have achieved employment through RSB's programs. During the period of this report, 499 Missourians achieved their vocational goals. Of these, 150 were placed in competitive employment, 26 work in sheltered placements, 33 became self-employed, and 6 went to work through the Business Enterprise Program. An additional 282 consumers chose to become homemakers, and two chose to work for no pay in a family business. These figures represent an increase of 34.5% compared to FY 1997 employment outcomes.

The educational needs of Missouri's children who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Education Committee (CEC) has worked extensively with RSB, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Missouri legislators to ensure that the concerns of children who are blind or visually impaired are expressed.

Definition of the Council's role in legislative matters through creation of the Governmental Affairs Committee. This committee is charged with reviewing, analyzing and recommending legislative positions to the Council. The committee will draft position papers on legislative matters that will be supplied to members and RSB to clarify the Council's position.

Advising RSB on development of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. The Council discussed methods of achieving the goals of the Rehabilitation Act for qualified rehabilitation personnel and advised RSB on the components that they thought should be included in the plan.

During this year, the SRC has enjoyed an unprecedented level of cooperation in performing their mandated functions of reviewing, recommending and advising RSB on rehabilitation services for Missouri's blind citizens. Through this relationship, more blind Missourians than ever before have achieved employment and independence. The final year of the millenium promises even greater achievements for the blind of Missouri, with the SRC/RSB taking ever larger steps toward helping the consumers they serve and represent realize their full personal and vocational success.

TABLE I. TYPES OF CLOSURE BY EXPENDITURE AND WAGES

TYPE OF CLOSURE

COST OF / AVG. COST / WEEKLY WAGES / AVG. WAGE / ANNUAL INCOME
SERVICES (GROUP) (GROUP)

BEP: 6 CLOSURES

1998	\$85,589	\$14,264	\$3,649	\$608	\$189,748
1997	\$95,989	\$23,997	\$1,851	\$462	\$96,252
1996	\$159,301	\$17,700	\$3,148	\$349	\$163,696

SELF-EMPLOYED: 33 CLOSURES

1998	\$281,771	\$8,538	\$9,579	\$290	\$498,108
1997	\$402,541	\$12,985	\$7,894	\$254	\$410,488
1996	\$276,664	\$17,291	\$5,145	\$321	\$267,540

SHELTERED: 26 CLOSURES

1998	\$370,921	\$14,266	\$2,744	\$105	\$142,688
1997	\$183,727	\$7,066	\$2,018	\$77	\$104,936
1996	\$53,035	\$7,576	\$737	\$105	\$38,324

COMPETITIVE: 150 CLOSURES

1998	\$1,509,887	\$10,065	\$49,914	\$332	\$2,595,528
1997	\$1,420,697	\$11,099	\$43,615	\$340	\$2,267,980
1996	\$1,510,927	\$14,254	\$34,052	\$321	\$1,770,704

HOMEMAKER: 282 CLOSURES

1998	\$413,834	\$1,467			
1997	\$248,354	\$1,364			
1996	\$240,613	\$1,513			

COST OF EMPLOYMENT CLOSURES (BEP, SELF-EMPL, SHELTERED, COMPETITIVE)

\$2,248,168

ANNUAL INCOME OF EMPLOYMENT CLOSURES

\$3,426,072

NOTE: The taxes paid by consumers successfully closed in FY 1998 would repay the cost of their rehabilitation in just over three years

SECTION II: RESULTS OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SYSTEM DURING FISCAL YEAR 1998

Vocational Rehabilitation Closures During Fiscal Year 1998

Fiscal Year 1998 was another successful year for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. Overall successful closures were up significantly, with 499 consumers closed as successfully rehabilitated. This compares with FY 1997, when 371 cases were closed successfully, and FY 1996 with 289. Of particular interest are the numbers of those employed competitively, self-employed, in sheltered employment, or with the Business Enterprise Program. In FY 1998, RSB was involved in the successful rehabilitation of 215 consumers in these types of employment. *This accomplishment shows an increase of 13.8% compared to FY 1997.* In the area of competitive employment, RSB recorded 150 closures, as compared to 129 in FY 1997 and 106 in FY 1996. These increases come in the area most emphasized by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, that of competitive employment. Additionally, 282 consumers completed their rehabilitation as homemakers. Some of the types of employment achieved by RSB consumers include:

Auto Care Specialist*Caseworker*Disabled Student Counselor* Computer Engineer*Personnel Director*Accounting Technician*Advertising Representative*Telemarketer*Customer Service Representative*Medication Technician*Construction Engineer*Clinical Social Worker*Law Counselor

COST/INCOME COMPARISON

RSB expended \$2,248,168 in rehabilitation funds on behalf of the 215 consumers who succeeded in competitive, sheltered, self-, and BEP employment during FY 1998. This relates to an average expenditure per case of \$10,456. In contrast, this group's annual income (extrapolated from weekly salary at time of closure) would be \$3,426,072, an amount which actually exceeds the cost of their rehabilitation in the first year following rehabilitation. If a 20% tax rate existed (state and federal combined), *the taxes paid by these consumers would repay the cost of their rehabilitation in just over three years*, irrespective of the reduction in Social Security and other disability payments. A total of \$413,834 was expended on behalf of the 282 consumers closed as homemakers, averaging \$1,467 per case. In all, \$2,684,408 was spent on 499 cases, for an average expenditure of \$5,379.

Overall, 84.6% of VR funds were expended in cases involving competitive, self-, sheltered and BEP employment. Only 15.4% of the funds expended were related to homemaker closures.

SECTION III: ACTIVITIES OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND DURING FISCAL YEAR 1998

RSB Budget

At the November, 1997 meeting of the SRC, RSB's Director informed the Council that RSB is overspending its budget. She reviewed with the Council some of the major increases in spending for FY 1997. Questions were raised regarding VR funds being used for setting up new BEP locations, as well as the restoration of present facilities. The Director reported that she had asked the department for supplemental appropriations for this present fiscal year, but was told to work within her budget. The Director expressed concern that without the extra funding, there could be an impact on employment outcomes. The Council voted to write a letter to the Director, with copies to the directors of the Division of Family Services and the Department of Social Services recommending that the agency seek the necessary supplemental appropriations for this state fiscal year. It was suggested to include in the letter the following factors: (1) as the employment closures increase, so do the expenses, (2) the agency cannot refuse services to an individual based upon cost, (3) that the agency is aware of the budget constraints and is making an effort to cut expenses wherever possible.

The Director then informed the Council that all new budget items requested by RSB for SFY 99 did remain in the department budget. These items include: one Children's Specialist for the Mid MO office, one O&M Specialist for the Kansas City area, one Rehabilitation Teacher, the position for the Older Blind Coordinator, and a Technology Specialist. Much concern was expressed regarding one Technology Specialist being able to serve all the technology needs of the agency. Other new budget items requested included: equipment update and maintenance, employer support and minority awareness, an Establishment Grant for a training site to instruct consumers on adaptive technology, three new BEP facilities and additional case service money.

At the February, 1998 meeting, the Director reported that all new budget requests were recommended by the Governor, with the exception of the \$35,000 decision item for employer and minority awareness. The House did pass all new decision items including the item not recommended by the Governor. She reviewed the new decision items with the Council, and said she would like to discuss possible new items for the FY 99 RSB budget at the May Council meeting. Additionally, she said that although overspending for the current fiscal year is still a concern, measures are being taken to tighten spending wherever possible.

At the May, 1998 meeting of the SRC, the Chairman of the Minority Outreach Committee, reported that although the minority outreach decision item of \$35,000 was not recommended by the Governor, it was approved by the House Budget Committee.

The Director reviewed with the Council the new decision items for the RSB FY99 budget that have been recommended by the General Assembly. These include: two rehabilitation teachers, one children's specialist, and one mobility specialist, the Older Blind Coordinator position, a technology specialist, the funding needed for the computer upgrade for staff, additional funding for case services, funding for the Establishment Grant, funding for two new BEP facilities and increased funding for the POB program. She pointed out that the only budget item not recommended by the Governor was the \$35,000 for employer and minority awareness, but the Conference Committee did recommend it. It was noted that the approval of the RSB budget was primarily due to support by the Council and the consumer groups.

This is significant as RSB's budget increase during the period of this report was approximately \$2,000,000, an increase of more than 20%.

At the August, 1998 meeting, the Director reviewed new budget items for State Fiscal Year 2000 with the Council. She said the first priority is approximately \$300,000 for professional development of staff. The second priority is for \$500,000 for employment opportunities which includes funding for computer equipment and rehabilitation engineering, funding to work with employers and other entities, funding for job retention and post-employment, and an additional employment specialist for the Kansas City area, two more counselors and two more teachers, another rehabilitation assistant and a Clerk IV for the other Kansas City office. The third budget item, entitled blind independent living for senior citizens,

includes two additional rehabilitation teachers to focus on providing services to senior citizens. She said \$300,000 is requested for BEP facilities, but this requires no state funding. Other budget items identified were \$35,000 for equipment upgrade for the Braille and Narration Center; \$114,000 for hardware and software maintenance and replacement, and state vehicle replacement, two per year for the next three years.

State/Strategic Plan

The Planning Committee met by conference call in late January to discuss the State Plan public hearings to be held around the state. The three recommendations that came from the committee regarding these meetings were: (1) that the meeting locations proposed by RSB were sufficient to allow a geographic distribution of input from the state; (2) that a focus group format similar to last year's be used in conducting the meetings; and (3) that Independent Living Centers be used wherever possible as a meeting place.

At the May, 1998 meeting, the RSB Director reported on the RSB State Plan hearings that were held around the state. She said the three main issues identified were: technology training, more field staff, and public awareness of RSB services. Attendance at these meetings was also discussed. One of the proposals that came from the public hearings that she is considering as a new budget item is a comprehensive system of case management for employers. The Council voted to have the Planning Committee meet soon to develop recommendations on the State Plan and submit these recommendations to the full Council, and that the Council meet by conference call to consider these recommendations.

The Planning Committee reviewed the results of the public hearings, public forums held by the Council and other sources of input, and during a teleconference call with the full Council participating offered the following recommendations for inclusion in the State Plan:

1. Increase frequency/timeliness of services
2. RSB should streamline the contract process for braille/rehab teaching contracts.
3. Continue efforts to identify/conduct outreach to parents and schools of children who are blind or visually impaired.

4. RSB should take on more outreach projects to increase visibility of RSB programs in the community, particularly in the minority community.
5. RSB staff should communicate more clearly to consumers the realistic timeline for actions/decisions/equipment purchase.
6. RSB should seek salary parity with DVR for field staff.
7. RSB should explore sponsoring a public information fair in minority community.
8. RSB should explore ways to provide rehabilitation facility training without the need for state contracts.

The Planning Committee reviewed the FY 1998 Strategic Plan submission and reported to the Council that the SRC should support the RSB Strategic Plan as amended for FY 1999.

Student Network

Originating as a program sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri (NFB), RSB became involved in sponsoring Student Network in 1994. With the involvement of both the Missouri Council of the Blind (MCB) and NFB, Student Network brings together students who are visually impaired or blind from secondary and post-secondary schools throughout the state for a weekend seminar aimed at improving their understanding of issues related to students with disabilities, self-improvement, advocacy and networking.

The SRC was notified at the August, 1998 meeting that there were concerns about the agenda and selection of speakers for Student Network scheduled to be held in Kansas City at the Airport Hilton hotel from November 20th - 22nd. The conference was cancelled pending discussion between RSB, MCB and NFB to arrive at a mutually agreeable agenda and list of speakers. RSB intends to bring the issue of Student Network scheduling to the November, 1998 SRC meeting.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey for FY 1997 Closures

The SRC staff conducted a survey of all RSB VR closures during FY 1997. Over 600 surveys were distributed, with a return rate of approximately 25%. The analysis of the surveys returned showed several significant trends in consumer satisfaction. Most noteworthy was the fact that the survey results of consumers employed outside the home showed significant improvement in satisfaction when

compared to the 1996 results. The Evaluation Committee will meet during the First Quarter, Fiscal Year 1999 to discuss surveys for future use.

Changes are being contemplated for future satisfaction surveys. SRC staff plan to send surveys out on a monthly basis in the future to improve the response rate. Additionally, the Rehabilitation Counseling program at the University of Missouri-Columbia has expressed interest in performing the satisfaction survey for the SRC. Meetings will be held in the First Quarter, Fiscal Year 1999 to negotiate with the Rehabilitation Counseling program regarding this possibility.

Technology Specialist

RSB first brought the concept of hiring a technology specialist to manage RSB's information system, advise on assistive technology such as speech and enlargement programs, and assist in administering RSB's contract for rehabilitation engineers, in FY 1997. At the November, 1997 meeting of the SRC, RSB's Director briefed the Council on a budget decision item to provide a Technology Specialist position within RSB that had been included in the Department of Social Services' budget. When notified at the August, 1998 meeting that the position had been approved in the State budget, the Director discussed the hiring of a Technology Specialist. The Council requested that RSB provide them with copies of the job description for this position as it was being developed. Following review of the proposed job description, a group of Council members met to develop a letter of support for RSB, taking the position that RSB needed to staff this position at a high enough salary level to attract qualified candidates. RSB plans to recruit for this position during the First Quarter, FY 1999.

Workforce Development

Just prior to the February, 1998 meeting of the SRC, word was received that the National Governors' Association, at a meeting held on the same weekend as the SRC's February meeting, was to present a position statement to federal lawmakers supporting the inclusion of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Workforce Development Program. This legislation, which would eliminate Vocational Rehabilitation as a separately funded program and require consumers with disabilities to seek services through a primarily non-disability related system, was an item of interest for the Council since unsuccessful efforts made to combine

workforce development and rehabilitation in 1996.

At the February, 1998 meeting, following discussion of the NGA's proposed position statement, the Council decided to express their concerns regarding workforce development to Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan before the NGA meeting. A letter was drafted, approved by the Council, and faxed to the Governor's office during the Friday afternoon session.

Governmental Affairs Committee

At the February, 1998 meeting, a motion was made and approved that, due to the interest and concern with State and Federal legislation, that an Ad-Hoc Legislative Committee be formed, and that action be taken to make that committee a standing committee in keeping with the bylaws of the SRC. Volunteers were solicited and a Chairperson named for the Ad-Hoc Committee.

Following the meeting, the National Federation of the Blind offered the SRC the opportunity to review and comment on a legislative proposal that was being drafted for introduction by Senator Harold Caskey. This matter was assigned to the Legislative Committee by the SRC Chairman. The Committee met several times by teleconference to offer their comments on this proposed legislation, which was not introduced in the Missouri Legislature due to time constraints. Senator Caskey did transmit the proposal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the request that they consider adopting the reporting provisions of the proposal in their annual report to the Legislature on the education status of children who are blind and visually impaired.

At the May, 1998 meeting, during discussion of the creation of a standing Legislative Committee, concern was expressed about the role of this committee, the legality of the SRC lobbying and under what circumstances the SRC's name could be used as supporting or opposing a specific issue. It was suggested that in the future to indicate the Council's position on a particular matter of interest to it, position papers could be developed that would be approved by the full Council that would then be provided to RSB and all Council members for use as they see fit. The Council voted to approve the addition of the Governmental Affairs Committee as a standing committee in the bylaws, as described below:

(D) Governmental Affairs Committee: Responsible for reviewing, analyzing

and recommending to the Council those matters pertaining to:

- (1) Legislation proposed/pending in the Missouri Legislature
- (2) Legislation proposed/pending in the U.S. Congress
- (3) Development of legislative materials/positions

First Card

At the August, 1998 meeting of the SRC, RSB reported on a joint venture of RSB and First Card, a new business in Springfield, Missouri. First Card has hired five RSB consumers and hopes up to 30 of RSB's consumers will become employed at First Card within the next year. RSB distributed information outlining the structure of the company, the job description and skills required, and the benefit package that First Card is providing. It was pointed out that there is an RSB liaison with First Card and all RSB referrals need to go through him. The company has given RSB two training slots, and the RSB liaison monitors the training. RSB hopes to do joint ventures similar to this with companies in all the major cities in the future. The Council expressed interest in touring First Card's facilities the next time it meets in the Springfield area.

Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

RSB's director brought the issue of Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) to the SRC at the February, 1998 meeting. Following general discussion, she proposed to develop a proposal for CSPD to be presented at the May, 1998 meeting. During that meeting, she described the difficulties associated with meeting the proposed definition of qualified personnel in the reauthorized Rehabilitation Act. Some of the areas of concern included:

The salary difference between RSB and the general VR agency, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The salary structure of current RSB staff

The process for affecting change in the Merit System's pay and qualifications for VR counselors and other staff

The budget impact of changing the RSB salary structure

The need to provide educational opportunities for current staff to allow them to meet the proposed “qualified personnel” standard.

Some concern was expressed that the plan would not be acceptable due to its treatment of current staff who lacked a Master's Degree. It was agreed that the Planning Committee would work with the Director in finalizing a proposal for CSPD. The Planning Committee met by teleconference and shared their concerns regarding CSPD, reviewed proposals prepared by RSB and agreed that the proposed plan should be adopted. At the August, 1998 SRC meeting, the Committee presented the proposal to the full Council, which voted to accept the proposal and recommend that RSB implement it. Some of the components of the proposal include:

A budget decision item to fund the increased salary requirements of repositioning staff to parity with DVR salary levels

A proposal to increase the standard for employment as a VR Counselor to a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation or a closely related area, contingent upon approval of the budget decision item to support the increased costs

A policy of supporting RSB’s current staff in attendance at universities offering degrees acceptable under RSB’s proposed standard

The CSPD plan was submitted to RSA in August, 1998 and was subsequently approved.

Contracting

In efforts to expand the availability of services to Missourians who are blind, RSB has developed contracts for Rehabilitation Teaching, Braille Teaching and Orientation and Mobility Services. During the period of this report, RSB has encountered difficulties with some aspects of administering these contracts, in particular the Braille Teaching contract, and has sought the advice and recommendations of the Council in revising the contracting processes.

At the November, 1997 meeting of the SRC, concern was raised regarding the consistency of administration of the Braille test to applicants to be accepted as independent contractors of Braille instructions to consumers. RSB's Coordinator of Special Services informed the Council on how the test was developed and how it is administered. This issue was discussed at length, and although no action was taken by the Council, it did suggest that the applicant be informed on what factors would be considered, including the time allowed for completing the test. RSB did institute a one hour time limit for the Braille test following this meeting.

At the May, 1998 SRC meeting, problems regarding the delays in getting Braille contractors paid that had been brought up at the public forum were discussed. Also discussed were the delays in the RFP process for Braille contractors and the test that is administered. The Council voted to recommend that all Braille contractor applicants need to pass RSB's test, regardless of previous certification by the NLS test.

At the completion of this report, RSB had contracted with 6 Braille teachers and 2 Orientation and Mobility instructors.

Children's Issues

In past years, the SRC has taken many actions regarding the education of children who are blind and visually impaired, including contacting the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), writing the Governor with their concerns, meeting with Teachers of the Visually Impaired and parents of children who require specialized services for visual impairment. Unfortunately, none of these efforts resulted in actions that would substantively effect change in the Missouri Special Education system. At the August, 1997 meeting, the SRC

directed the Chairperson of the Children's Education Committee (CEC), to contact the Chairs of the Missouri House and Senate Education Committees.

The Chairperson met with Senator Ted House, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee in October, 1997. Senator House was provided with materials to educate him about the concerns and issues relating to students who are blind or visually impaired. Senator House then committed to writing the DESE, asking them to respond in writing to the issues discussed. When the response was received, Senator House shared it with the SRC and asked for their comments.

Additionally, the CEC was asked by Senators House and Caskey to review information that was provided by DESE in response to Senate Concurrent Resolution 23, passed in May, 1997. SCR 23 requests that DESE report on the educational status of blind and visually impaired students on an annual basis to the Legislature. The CEC wrote Senators House and Caskey, providing them with an analysis of the information provided in the report. Subsequently, the Missouri Legislature passed H.B 1088, which made the DESE reporting requirement a State law.

Assistive Technology

The SRC has been involved in several areas relating to RSB's provision of services, equipment and training relating to assistive technology. At the November, 1997 SRC meeting, there was a lengthy discussion on the importance of getting staff trained on assistive technology and how this might be accomplished. The discussion also included the importance of consumers receiving the proper training on assistive technology. During the period of this report, RSB has taken several actions to improve on the provision of assistive technology to consumers. First, all RSB VR Counselors attended the conference on assistive technology sponsored by the Missouri Assistive Technology Project. At the conclusion of this conference, RSB presented a day-long seminar on how to work with rehabilitation engineers to ensure appropriate assistive technology recommendations are developed for consumers. Additionally, RSB has received authority to hire a Technology Specialist, which position will be charged with both maintaining RSB's internal computer systems, as well as advising RSB on assistive technology matters and coordinating the operations of RSB's contracted rehabilitation engineers.

Communication with Other Disability-Related Councils

At the May, 1998 meeting, liaison with other disability councils was discussed. Several of the liaisons appointed by the SRC reported having been unable to attend meetings of their assigned council, and difficulty in receiving information regarding the other council's issues and activities. A proposal was made and adopted that the SRC should add all of the disability-related councils in state government to the mailing list for SRC minutes, and request that the SRC be provide with copies of their minutes. It was hoped that this would allow for better understanding of cross-disability issues, identification of like issues and activities, and increased communication between the various councils.

Older Blind Services

At the August, 1997 SRC meeting, an ad-hoc committee was formed to advise RSB on the Older Blind Services (OBS) program. At the November, 1997 meeting, the question was raised whether the Council should or should not be involved with OBS issues. RSB's Supervisor of Field Operations explained that the Council is funded under Title I and all responsibilities of the Council identified in the Rehabilitation Act are connected to Vocational Rehabilitation services. The OBS program is administered under Title VII, Chapter 2 (Independent Living). The Council agreed that the Older Blind Committee should remain in existence.

At the February, 1998 meeting, RSB's Director expressed concern regarding RSB trying to serve the needs of all the older blind of Missouri. Additionally, there are concerns about the continuation of funding for services currently delivered to "VR Homemakers" under Title I. She had met with staff of the Mason Eye Institute in Columbia (part of the University of Missouri-Columbia Hospital) to discuss this issue, and they are interested in expanding their services to this population. The Director asked for input from the SRC on possible solutions to this dilemma.

At the May, 1998 meeting, the Mason Eye Institute gave a presentation on the services they provide and their concerns for the issues of serving the low-vision population of Central Missouri. In particular, they described some of the problems they were encountering and the need for additional services and funding to meet the needs of this population. They requested help in promoting the development of a comprehensive low-vision care program and adequate funding for the appropriate assistive technology. After a lengthy discussion of this topic, it was agreed that a

meeting would be set up by RSB, inviting all interested organizations and consumer groups to discuss low-vision services prior to the the August Council meeting.

The meeting between RSB, Mason Eye Institute and other consumers and stakeholders took place on September 3, 1998. A position paper on the issues discussed was developed at the meeting and provided to the SRC. Discussion of this position paper will take place at the November, 1998 SRC meeting. Some of the issues included in the position paper include:

The low rate of reimbursement for low-vision services and evaluations by Medicaid and Medicare

Insufficient funding for adaptive equipment and devices (average expenditure of \$300 unreimbursed by Medicaid or Medicare)(only limited purchase available through RSB)

Lack of sufficient personnel trained to administer low-vision evaluations and provide training on alternative techniques and equipment

Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act

One of the areas of concern that was monitored closely during the period of this report was the Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. At the February, 1998 SRC meeting, the SRC staff summarized the important changes in the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. He said that the proposal of granting advisory councils co-signatory authority on the State Plan is not included in either the House nor the Senate versions; however, there is a possibility that some advocacy groups will push to have that proposal added. Other changes included:

1. Simplifying access to Vocational Rehabilitation
2. Streamlining administration
3. Reauthorizing the Act for anywhere from three (House version) to seven (Senate version) years
4. Requiring the state VR agency and the state Rehabilitation Council to jointly conduct the triennial comprehensive needs assessment, and to jointly set annual employment goals for individuals with disabilities

There are also proposed changes in the individual's role in developing the

employment plan, and adding voluntary mediation for resolving disputes in addition to the hearings and due process that currently exist. He said if anyone is interested in a copy of the Act, it can be sent to them. The Council voted that members should emphasize to their Senators and Representatives the importance of maintaining a separate program for Vocational Rehabilitation and that it not be included in the Workforce Development Act, and that a letter to that effect be sent to Missouri's congressional delegation on behalf of the Council.

Again at the May, 1998 meeting, the SRC's staff reported on the Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. He said reauthorization has been amended into the Workforce Improvement Partnership Act. According to both the House and Senate versions, rehabilitation would remain a separate system with separate funding. It was currently assigned to a conference committee to work out the differences between the two versions. He explained that SRAC cosignatory authority for the State Plan is not included in either version. During this discussion, one of the members who had attended the SRC Conference in Chicago expressed the concern of that group regarding cosignatory authority for the SRACs. A vote was taken, in which the Council refused to support the concept of cosignatory authority for the SRACs. The Ticket to Work Act was also discussed. Although no action was taken by the Council on this issue, members were encouraged to discuss it with Congressman Hulshof who had asked for input on it from RSB.

At the August, 1998 meeting, SRC staff reported that President Clinton had signed into law the Workforce Investment Act on August 7th, and the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act was included in its entirety into this act. He said copies of this very large document will be provided to anyone who requests it in alternate formats. He pointed out the changes of the new Rehabilitation Act that pertain to the Council. These include: (1) the word "Advisory" in the Council name has been removed; (2) two representatives to the council will be added, a DESE representative and a representative from the State Workforce Investment Board; (3) statewide studies will be conducted every three years jointly by RSB and the Council; (4) the goals and priorities of the State Plan will be jointly developed, reviewed and agreed upon between the Council and the agency, however, the Council does not have co-signatory authority; and (5) the IWRP will now be known as the Individual Plan for Employment, (IPE). A plan will be developed during the First Quarter, FY 1999 for the Council and agency to meet to determine changes that must be made as required by the new Rehabilitation Act.

Regional SRC Conference

A contingent of two SRC members and two SRC staff members attended the Regional SRC Conference held in Chicago in May, 1998. The SRC Conference was held to allow SRCs from throughout the Midwest to meet and discuss matters of mutual concern and interest. Some of the subjects discussed during the conference included:

- Cooperation with State Agencies

- The SRC's role in Agency planning functions

- How best to achieve the goals of SRC involvement, as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act

- The SRC's position regarding co-signatory authority for the State Plan

Missouri SRC members and staff members took part in several presentations, including those relating to developing the cooperative relationship with state agencies and role clarification for the SRCs.

The conference concluded with the discussion of future meetings of this nature, and the possibility of creating a national organization of SRC's. Although no actions were taken during the conference, future meetings will be held by conference call to explore creation of such an organization.

SRC Website

Following the creation of the RSB website, several members expressed interest in creating a web page for the SRC on the RSB site. SRC staff developed a list of materials which outlined the legislation creating the Council, the bylaws, and responsibilities of the Council. In order to make the most use of the Internet to achieve the goals of the Council to reach the consumers served by RSB, meeting announcements, copies of minutes for the past calendar year and documents of interest to consumers of vocational rehabilitation, such as the Rehabilitation Act were placed on the site. Development, testing and implementation of the site are planned for First Quarter, FY 1999.

SECTION IV: SUMMARY

The period of this report has seen the Council involved in a wide variety of issues that relate to the services available to the blind of Missouri. The inclusion of the SRC in development of RSB's plans and policies has led to great improvements in both the services available to RSB's consumers and in efforts to improve the quality of RSB's staff. With the 1998 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, the SRC looks forward to even greater involvement in the issues and concerns that matter most to Missourians who look to RSB for services leading to their personal and vocational success.